THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI R.VELU): (a) Talcher-Bimlagarh (154 kms) new line project was included in the Supplementary Budget 2003-04. Final Location Survey has been completed and land acquisition has been taken up. An outlay of Rs. 15 crore has been provided during 2007-08.

(b) No, Sir. The distance between Rourkela and Bhubaneswar will get reduced by about 100 kms.

(c) As per the information available, no such agitations have come to the notice of the Railways.

(d) No target date has been fixed. The work will be progressed and completed as per availability of resources.

Fire in "Palace on Wheels"

82. SHRI RAJEEV CHANDRASEKHAR: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether fire broke out in the engine of the 'Palace on Wheels' train at Delhi on the 3rd October, 2007;

(b) if so, whether the cause of fire has been inquired into, if so, the findings of the inquiry and the action taken thereon; and

(c) the loss of men and material suffered by the Railways as a result of this fire?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI R. VELU): (a) and (b) In the incident under reference, steam and flames from the fire box of the steam engine of the 'Palace on Wheels' train entered the Driver's cab due to suspected malfunction of boiler component. The incident is being inquired into by the Commissioner of Railway Safety, Northern Circle.

(c) In this incident two railway employees lost their lives and three suffered injuries. The Loco has suffered minor damage in this mishap.

Vacancies in Railways

83. SHRI T.T.V. DHINAKARAN: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) the details of vacancies in Railways including technical level, zone-wise;

(b) the action taken to fill up the vacancies; and

(c) whether any survey has been conducted to find out the relationship between accidents and vacancies?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI R. VELU): (a) The approximate vacancies on zonal railways for Group 'C' & 'D' as on 30.09.2007 are:

Central	12890	Eastern	13415
East Central	15401	East Coast	8438
Northern	17531	North Central	9310
North Eastern	3766	Northeast Frontier	11066

North Western	8744	Southern	7922
South Central	10919	South Eastern	11888
South East Central	8893	South Western	7363
Western	10124	West Central	7830

(b) Action for filling of vacancies is a continuous process. Vacancies are filled primarily through open market recruitment, which is done through Railway Recruitment Boards or by the Zonal Railways themselves. Other vacancies in the promotional grade are however filled through departmental promotions.

(c) No, Sir.

Freight trains running with high axle load

84. SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Comptroller and Auditor General has pulled up Railways for permitting freight trains to run with higher axle loads endangering the safety of the rolling stock, bridges and tracks, this had led to increasing cases of spring failure, buffer coupler failures and wagon body damage and permitting load increase by six-to-eight tonnes for coal and iron-ore would have an adverse impact on tracks, bridges and rolling stock;

(b) what are the other main points pointed by the CAG; and

(c) the steps taken and also suggestions considered?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI R. VELU): (a) and (b) Chapter I-Freight and Wagon Management on Indian Railways of CAG's (Comptroller and Auditor General's) Report No. 6 of 2007, in which CAG has commented upon the running of freight trains with higher axle loads, has been selected for examination by Public Accounts Committee of Parliament. The chapter is concerned, not only with higher axle loads but various other aspects of Freight and Wagon Management on Indian Railways. The Recommendation of CAG with regard to "Impact of CC (Carrying Capacity) Enhancement" is as under:

"Since loading of wagons beyond permitted axle load limits is likely to damage rolling stock as well as track, Railways should take urgent steps to complete the installation of weigh bridges at all the loading points and strengthening the monitoring mechanism as envisaged. Since the increase in permissible axle load reduces and leeway available, no overloading whatsoever should be permitted as this would have serious impact on track."

(c) Inputs such as Ultra Sonic Flaw Detection (USFD), Wheel Impact Load Detector (WILD), bridg instrumentation etc. and maintenance requirements are being provided as per requirements for higher axle load operation. Indian Railways have installed 106 Electronic-in-motion weighbridges (as on July, 2007) to check the wagons for overloading, if any, for protection of wagons.

Detailed comments of the Ministry of Railways on all aspects contained in this chapter have since been furnished to the Lok Sabha Secretariat for submission before the Public Accounts Committee. The PAC have also desired to have oral evidence of Railway Board on matter contained in this chapter. The oral evidence has, however, not been held so far. As per the laid down procedure, after examination of this matter by PAC and after submission of